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20th Century Latin American Architecture: a network and an exhibition

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Abstract

The Observatório de Arquitetura Latinoamericana Contemporânea – ODALC (Observatory of Contemporary Latin American Architecture) is a network of researchers of the University of São Paulo (Brazil), Universidad Nacional (Colombia) and Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana (Mexico) dedicated to the study of contemporary Latin American architecture and cities. As a joint research based in three different countries, with a yearly program of activities, distances and travel costs hinder a more flowing integration, although the existing availability of many IT communication and database facilities. These are diversionary set of tools, for their operational complexity, somewhat beyond real research needs in Humanities. This is a presentation that aims at showing some current *modus operandi* of the network, their limitation, and the present challenge of building a database and/or system that facilitates remote exchanges and also to discuss together the conception of a virtual/digital exhibition on the 20th century Latin American Architecture.

Keywords: Latin American architecture; Architecture research networking; Architecture exhibition; Online exhibition; IT solutions for exhibitions

Introduction

Latin American architecture and urbanism is a relevant subject of study throughout the American continent, with several centers of excellence in Latin America and in the United States, as well as, in other regions such as Portugal and Spain.

As of 2009, groups of researchers located in three of these centers of excellence, at the University of São Paulo (São Paulo, Brazil), Universidad Nacional (Bogotá, Colombia) and Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana – Xochimilco (México D.F., México), following scientific exchanges carried out in previous years, decided to organize a joint research focusing on contemporary architecture in Latin America. The Observatório de Arquitetura Latinoamericana Contemporânea – ODALC, or Observatory of Latin American Contemporary Architecture, is a network aiming at the systematic process of knowledge production, international academic integration and education, involving senior researchers, young researchers, doctoral, master and undergraduate students.

Almost yearly meetings, held in Bogotá (2009), São Paulo (2011), México D.F. (2012), Bogotá (2014), Recife (2015), Oaxaca (2016), have been the forums for discussion of research results. Notwithstanding the importance of the exchange of information, debates and the dialectic of personal meetings, the record of results lacks satisfactory documentation, since the proceedings of these meetings usually lack the richness of post-presen-

tation reflections.

The format of these meetings replicates a traditional practice of presenting results. However, considering the speed of the contemporary world, one wonders whether an international collaboration, as desired within the ODALC, would rather benefit from the use of more dynamic platforms of work. Through a new platform of work the collaboration would be achieved through interaction not in large meetings format, but in micro-meetings, and the sharing of works or co-works in progress within localized and timely exchanges.

As a trilateral joint effort, distances and travel costs hinder a more flowing integration between the members of the network.

Of course, there are tools available for virtual modes of co-working research and development: video conferencing, Skype, cloud computing, webpages, blogs, Facebook, Mendeley, Endnote, Zotero, Google devices, etc. However, this set of tools can be as useful as diversionary, for their operational complexity somewhat stands beyond real research needs in Humanities.

In addition, a structure of researchers that involves different generations results in the disparity of opinions about the use of new technological

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tools, between senior researchers who do not always dominate the IT tools, and young people with computer dominance but still immature experience in the scientific contents and methodology. Even the young generations end up using information technology as a limited tool of work, not as a resource to support the analysis of ideas about architectural design, city and urban planning. More friendly interfaces which will allow for digital inclusion is still a challenge to be overcome in order to fully incorporate new technologies in effective processes of collection, analysis and output of information of specialized scientific value.

We agree with the theme explanation of the Symposium:

Nowadays, historians, theoreticians and critics of architecture, urban design and planning have access to a huge quantity and diversity of information. They are impelled to engage into the disclosure of the knowledge produced at a local level for a larger global audience. At the same time, they need to think about how certain criteria and standards permit or impede the comparison and the sharing of this knowledge being produced in varied contexts.

These are important challenges of the 21st century that they have now to tackle in order to produce an architectural and planning culture that is critical, updated and global in scope.

The diversity of information handled in architecture and urban studies results from the diversity of approaches to the wide complexity of subjects in research. This is an important point of entanglement for projects of collective driving, which must also include individual doctorates, master's degrees researchers and undergraduate participation, integrated to the scope of the ODALC purposes.

The most usual type of information and documentation managed in architectural and urban researches deal with drawings (technical plans, sketches, mappings), photography, audio, movies and videos, digital files (of 2D or 3D modeling softwares such as AutoCAD, ArchiCAD, SketchUp, GIS software, Power Point, etc.) written material, articles and publications in general (printed or digital) and databases which collect materials in free format (individual annotations, sketches, observations, fiches).

This implies the designing and application of databases, datasets, data collection systems, and other potential resources that IT could offer, sur-

passing traditional and limited ways of data collection, archiving, processing and analysis.

Among the various aims proposed during the regular meetings, two issues emerged as challenges related to potentialities of IT:

1. Build a more specific database according to the network's research needs, exploiting IT resources to allow the circulation of internal documentation (of no public access due to the recording and use of copyrighted material). The system should allow for a more intense interactivity among the members of the three countries. Data feeds, information exchange and sharing of work development should be done from and to any research center, with a more user friendly unfragmented platform than those available in international research software systems.
2. The design of a virtual/online exhibition on the 20th century Architecture in Latin America. The exhibition would be organized with flexible contents, multilingual, shaped according to the occasion and the desired focus of users. It would be possible to select segments of the totality, according to chronological, thematic, typological, geographical or any other convenient criteria. It could be exhibited in museums, cultural centers and schools by means of large-format projections or in monitors, or presented in the form of lectures. It would be constantly remodeled and updated, according to the advances of the research and improvement of the available material for the show.

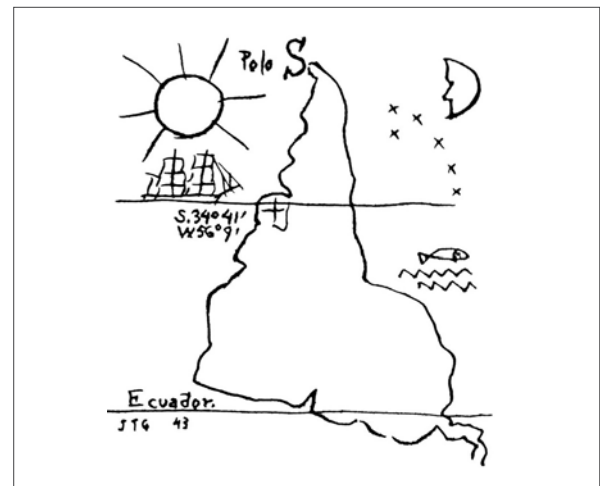


Fig.1. Joaquín Torres-García (1874-1949), *America inverted*, 1943.